

waka kuaka



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SPECIAL ISSUE:
Tikanga, Kaumātua and Place



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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The editors acknowledge the passing of Ariki Tā Tumu Te Heuheu, paramount chief of Ngāti Tūwharetoa and former patron of The Polynesian Society. His whakamaumahara has been prepared by Professor Richard Benton.

Each year the Māori monarch, presently Te Arikiniui Kuīni Nga wai hono i te po, holds ngā poukai, a series of visits to different marae affiliated to the Kīngitanga. The dates for these visits are set for each marae, usually associated with an important historical event. The Tūrangawaewae Marae poukai occurs on 18 March. In the weeks leading up to the event in 2026, a group of hau kāinga, including one of our co-editors (Marama), met weekly for waiata practice at the Five Acres, a time-honoured piece of land which is part of Tūrangawaewae Marae in Ngāruawāhia. The Five Acres, which was once an abundant māra kai, is now occupied by kaumātua residences and various community facilities. The venue where practices were held is a charming old building, once a schoolhouse, now decorated with children's artwork. It was opened up for practice each week by a kuia key holder who lives locally.

Kuia led the practices, keeping strictly to a two-hour schedule. Everyone in the group was related in one way or another. One of the kuia leaders directed from her wheelchair and saved all her energy over the week for the practice. Another experienced teacher, who sometimes struggles to breathe, alternated directing the group. Two other women, not yet kaumātua, are undergoing leadership training from the older women. A few frail, much older women, known as rūruhi, came to practices, observed closely, made supportive comments and sang with the group, but did not stand up to sing at the poukai.

At one session, the role of the kaumātua at poukai and other formal events was explained by one of the leaders: "We make the rules for what happens on the paepae; all other things are the domain of the marae committee, but no one can tell us kaumātua what to do on the paepae."

She went on to tell the group that the purpose of waiata on these occasions is to carry the mauri for the day. Someone asked why a waiata they were learning differed from the version they knew from another Waikato-affiliated waiata group. The kuia replied that while other groups are widely known for their skilled interpretations of waiata and haka, "our waiata may differ in kupu or melody from another group's version". Carrying the mauri, the waiata for the poukai connects the tūpuna from Tūrangawaewae Marae to their living descendants and future generations. The kuia leaders were fiercely strict about their accuracy and delivery. As one rūruhi said from the sidelines, "this grassroots group is learning beautiful, sweet-sounding Waikato waiata with kupu to match".

Marama was struck by these explanations of the role of kaumātua on the paepae and their interpretations of waiata, since this special issue of *Waka Kuaka: The Journal of the Polynesian Society* is dedicated to studies that emphasise the important role of kaumātua in Māori society. Kaumātua, male and female, set and maintain tikanga and carry the mauri for important occasions on the marae. Their role in the research presented here has been to advise on tikanga for research procedures that are appropriate to their people, their whenua and moana, and thus they are co-designers in projects held in their various rohe. Kaumātua also participated in the research via wānanga, hui and interviews. Through their advice and participation, kaumātua have given access to deeper understandings of mātauranga Māori, in these collaborations between science, academia and Māori communities. This coming together of Western science and mātauranga Māori gives rise to knowledge that can be appropriately applied to contemporary policies and practices affecting Māori.

Moreover, the tikanga of research with Māori communities involves more than conducting projects and producing academic publications, appropriate disseminations and research impact. The tikanga, or “right way of doing things”, leads to enduring relationships that long outlast the projects and involve researchers in continuing kōrero and actions. Over the years, Marama and Hilary have been involved in countless meetings with kaumātua and kuia advising on various projects, and they have found that wide-ranging conversations continue well after research tools are laid down. While this special issue was being prepared, Marama and Hilary met for lunch with Whaea Ngahuia Dixon in Ngāruawāhia to discuss co-authorship of the first article in the issue that presents findings from a kaumātua hauora project. This project from its conception had involved Whaea Ngahuia and Whaea Ngapare Hopa, her close friend, now deceased. Both kuia had left their academic careers far behind them, but certainly not their expertise and commitment to mātauranga Māori. Whaea Ngahuia is an expert in te reo Māori and on the multifaceted significance of water to Māori, and Whaea Ngapare was a distinguished anthropologist. The conversation turned to how best to acknowledge their input into this research and how to frame up the special issue. At some point Gerald Lanning also joined the conversation around the table, and we listened intently to Whaea Ngahuia’s usual gems, which sprinkled the conversation, clarifying aspects of tikanga, te reo and whenua.

In another example of continuing relationships, authors on the wastewater testing project presented in this issue recently gathered at PHF Science’s laboratories in Christchurch to close their research project with the appropriate tikanga. So, we conclude that Māori-focused research that is led by tikanga has no endpoint. Lasting relationships are welded, involving

continuing mutuality and obligation, and the *kōrero* does not stop. This is in line with how Gerald Lanning, in his contribution to this publication, explains *tikanga* as an ethical framework preoccupied with relationships that stretch through past, present and future, and across the kinship of humans and other natural phenomena in their environments.

The first article in this special issue, from Marama Muru-Lanning, Hilary Lapsley, Jade Farley and Whaea Ngahuia Dixon, foregrounds the voices and lived experiences of *kaumātua* in relation to *whakapapa*, *whenua* and *hauora*. Its title, “He uri au nō tēnei whenua (I am a descendant of this land)”, encapsulates how in Māori epistemology, the people are descended from their *whenua*—its mountains, rivers and lakes—as well as from their ancestors. This project, involving conversations with *kaumātua* in northern and central North Island regions, shows how the health of *whenua*, shaped as it is by history, geography and socioeconomic forces, and differing by locality, is fundamental to *kaumātua* experiences of health and ageing. *Whakapapa* descent lines link humans, places and the natural world from shared origins through to the present and future and are fundamental to *tikanga* and *mātauranga* Māori.

The next article, by Gerald Lanning, “‘Relating Well’ Across Generations: A Practical Application of *Tikanga* and *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* in *Kāwhia Moana*”, clearly sets out the argument for the application of *tikanga* principles in circumstances where environmental processes are at stake, particularly (but not only) at the level of small coastal communities. It further addresses a community’s application of *te Tiriti* and how that both empowers and is empowered by using *tikanga* in relation to socioenvironmental concerns.

“Para Hopuhopu: Co-designing *Tikanga* for Wastewater Testing” comes from professional researchers from PHF Science, Waikato-Tainui College for Research and Development, Waipapa Taumata Rau|The University of Auckland and *kaumātua* from *Te Kei o Te Waka o Tainui*. Wastewater testing during the COVID-19 pandemic was done exclusively by PHF Science, and Māori scholars and communities were critical of how the testing was conducted and the data disseminated; the negative impact on Māori communities prompted PHF Science to start a collaboration to co-design future projects with Māori communities. The article in this special issue demonstrates a framework for designing studies that ensure mutual benefits for both scientists and *tangata whenua*, founded on trust, shared opportunities, access to knowledge and transparent communication.

“*Tangihanga* and *Tikanga* in the Time of COVID-19: Māori Experiences and Responses”, from Francesca Towers, Heather T. Battles and Marama Muru-Lanning, draws on research that investigated Māori experiences of *tangihanga* and associated *tikanga* during the first two years of the COVID-19

pandemic in Aotearoa. They found that the pandemic response had profound impacts on tangihanga and normal tikanga protocols surrounding death and dying, and that these impacts were frequently associated with negative hauora outcomes. Misalignments between the values and priorities of the government and Māori were indicative of broader social issues, especially regarding appropriate recognition of tikanga Māori. Their article emphasises the ethnography of the project, prioritising the voices of kaumātua and their insights on tangihanga during the COVID-19 restrictions.

A Kōrerō from Luana Pirihi, Patrick Hilton, Pania Moulton and Mere Kepa, “Forests, Mangroves and Sand”, tells a story of resistance, resilience and aroha in Takahiwai, from the first land confiscations in the 1800s to the work of kaumātua kaitiaki living there today. The story focuses on the controversial expansion of mānawa in the harbour and the proposed sand mining at Bream Bay, and the efforts of kaitiaki to uphold tikanga while protecting and restoring their whenua and moana for future generations.

To close, we have a kōrero tairitenga from one of our kaumātua participants, Whaea Maea Marshall, who reflects on the teachings and associated tikanga of her tūpuna and becoming a kaumātua who must similarly pass on these gifts to future generations.

In our book reviews, three very different histories and one critical study are examined. Matariki Williams surveys *Te Hau Kāinga: The Māori Home Front during the Second World War* (2024) by Wanhalla *et al.* and its companion volume, *Raupanga: Ngā Pito Kōrero o te Pakanga Tuarua nō te Hau Kāinga* (2024), which is authored in te reo Māori by Lachy Paterson and co-edited by Wanhalla and Paterson. Nina Finigan’s review is of a book treating a more recent time period and an underrepresented community, Cheryl Ware’s *Untold Intimacies: A History of Sex Work in Aotearoa, 1978–2008* (2025). *Edges of Empire: The Politics of Immigration in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1980–2020* (2025), reviewed by Read Wheeler, historicises 40 years of immigration in Aotearoa New Zealand during a period bounded by the rise of 1980s neoliberalism and the closed borders of the COVID-19 years. The fourth review, by Latafale Allyssa Verner-Pula, is of *Oceans Between Us: Pacific Peoples and Racism in Aotearoa* (2025), edited by Sereana Naepi, a critical analysis of the barriers that racism poses for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa.

Marama Muru-Lanning, Hilary Lapsley and Lynn Lewis-Bevan

GLOSSARY

These terms, used in the text, are te reo Māori (Aotearoa). Additional terms appear in the journal's house glossary.

aroha	love
haka	posture dance
hau kāinga	local people of a marae
hauora	health and wellbeing
hui	meeting
kaitiaki	guardian, custodian
kaumātua	elder, senior
kōrero tairitenga	poem, allegory
kuia	female elder
kupu	words, lyrics
mānawa	mangroves
marae	communal gathering place
māra kai	food garden
mauri	essence, vitality
moana	body of water
paepae	orator's bench
poukai	Māori monarch's annual visits to marae affiliated with the Kīngitanga
rūruhi	elderly woman
tangata whenua	the people of the land
tangihanga	funeral
tikanga	customary values and practices, right way of doing things
tūpuna	ancestors
waiata	action song
wānanga	discussion session, sharing of ideas
whakapapa	ancestral connections
whakamaumahara	tribute
whenua	land

